

US Homeland Security Suggests Military Action in Nigeria

DHS Targets Nigerian Islamist Group Boko Haram

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For the fifth consecutive day, the Nigerian people have staged national strikes throughout their country in protest of the recent removal of fuel subsidies, which more than doubled the prices of transportation and commodities. In the northern city of Kano, protestors have demanded the immediate dismissal of their Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Vice President of the World Bank. A worldwide spike in the price of oil could very well be prompted by an impending production halt as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers threaten to suspend their operations if a compromise is not met.

As turmoil ensues and Nigerian law enforcement officers begin to join the IMF-induced demonstrations, President Goodluck Jonathan's recent declaration of the dire threat posed by Islamist group Boko Haram appears to be setting the stage for a coming initiative. A recent video posted online by alleged Boko Haram leader, Imam Abubakar Shekau successfully channels the theatrics of Bin-Ladenesque villainy, as he exclaims, "First we do not believe in the Nigerian constitution and secondly we do not believe in democracy but only in the laws of Allah." Shekau familiarly goes onto pledge his groups' commitment to wage jihad and bring death to America.

"Boko Haram" in the Hausa language translates into "Western education is sacrilege", the group has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks across the country, most notably for the August 2011 suicide bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. Mohammed Yusuf, a Muslim cleric who was allegedly the victim of an extrajudicial execution at the hands of Nigerian security forces, formed the group in 2002. Under the command of Imam Abubakar Shekau, The group has shown to be violently opposed to secular leadership and Nigeria's own Muslim elites, while striving to implement Sharia Law and the eventual establishment of an Islamic State in Northern Nigeria.

Amidst the current economic unrest in the nation, sectarian violence has continued provoking retaliatory attacks between religious groups along the sensitive Niger Delta region, a prominent source of oil largely designated for export to the United States and others. Imam Abubakar Shekau's recent video transmission espouses fanaticism that may form the beginnings of a sectarian civil war, stating "Christians cheated and killed us to the extent of eating our flesh like cannibals; you did all you wanted to us. We are trying to coerce you to embrace Islam, because that is what God instructed us to do."

Regardless of this group's legitimacy, remarkable unoriginality and possible foreign nurturing, the case for marketing foreign military intervention to Western audiences is

steadily increasing. As an OPEC member, an unstable political climate leading to inaccessibility of its enormous domestic oil reserves would have dramatic ramifications for global oil markets. As the fourth largest supplier of oil to the United States, it is clear that the American Government would behave forcefully to preserve its stake in the region. A recently released subcommittee report issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security entitled “Boko Haram: Emerging Threat to the US Homeland” is a further testament towards the shape of things to come.

The document insinuates the growing threat of Boko Haram by associating it with other terrorist groups in the region such as Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Somalian militant group Al-Shabaab; the authors themselves reiterate on the sensitivity of the resources within the Niger Delta region.

Page 18

In May 2007, protestors from the Ogoni tribe in the Niger Delta overran an oil pipeline, cutting Nigerian oil production by 30 percent. That same month, militants from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), bombed three pipelines, decreasing oil production by 100,000 barrels a day for the Italian oil company Eni. This disruption caused oil prices to rise by 71 cents a barrel in New York. A well-co-ordinated attack by Boko Haram could result in far worse damage, completely cutting off Nigerian oil production in a worst-case scenario. If that occurred, eight percent of U.S. oil imports would be cut off, which could result in a spike in oil prices worldwide and soaring domestic gas prices.

Furthermore, in an effort to combat the emerging instability being seen throughout Nigeria, the authors of this document suggest implementing a military cooperation policy similar to that administered in Yemen, which ostensibly includes extrajudicial assassination and the use of unmanned aerial drone bombardments.

Page 24

It is critical that the U.S. work more closely with Nigerian security forces to develop greater domestic intelligence collection and sharing with the U.S. Intelligence Community. Military cooperation is vital to a successful counterterrorism strategy. A possible model includes Yemen, with whom U.S. built an effective intelligence sharing partnership following the Christmas Day 2009 attempted attack to hunt suspected militants. While this relationship continues to pose challenges, it has had notable success, highlighted by the killing of Anwar al Awlaki.

Just as the Franco-Anglo-American triumvirate orchestrated the recent snatch-and-grab regime change in Libya, the same military-industrial players are offering their services in an effort to secure their share of domestic resources within Nigeria.

Page 25

In a recent display of growing international concern surrounding the rise of Boko Haram, France has offered military support to Nigeria. Meeting in Abuja with his Nigerian counterpart, Olugbenga Ashira. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe stated: “We shall fight against this phenomenon. We are ready to share any information. We are ready to coordinate our intelligence services. We are

ready also to give our help in training cooperation. France is directly concerned with the question of terrorism.” Lieutenant General Azubuike Ihejirika, the Nigerian Army Chief of Staff, said that in addition to the United States and France, Pakistan and Britain have also offered to assist with counterterrorism training.

Although the document admits that Boko Haram poses a low threat to the US homeland, it cites the case of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to detonate a bomb in his underwear during a Christmas day flight on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 as an instance where seemingly obscure terrorist organizations thought to lack capability to deploy militants to the United States were nearly successful, thus requiring increasing vigilance to combat an ever increasing threat. It certainly makes one reexamine the supposed threat posed by foreign terrorist groups when examining the mainstream media reportage of the Abdulmutallab incident, which famously omitted critical eyewitness testimony that exposed the involvement of various elements of the US Intelligence community.

If Nigeria continues to face severe instability, the actions foreign powers will take to preserve their economic and geopolitical interests is quite clear. At this stage, it remains uncertain whether Boko Haram is a legitimate indigenous extremist movement or a nurtured product of Intelligence communities working to benefit from destabilizing Africa’s most populous nation. The tired theatrics and recycled rhetoric of Boko Haram’s leadership certainly lends credence to the latter. As The United States African Command (AFRICOM) continues to expand its influence throughout the continent, the entity has long anticipated Nigerian instability; its 2008 war-game scenario envisioned 20,000 U.S. troops maintaining security of the Niger Delta oil fields within a dissolved anarchic Nigeria.

According to a Washington, D.C. based journalist, Scott Morgan, Nigerian military sources have confirmed that U.S. troops are scheduled to be deployed within Nigeria to help local forces do battle with Boko Haram. U.S. officials have not confirmed the deployment, however the increased presence in the region would be consistent with the cumulative expansion of an aggressive Pan-African foreign policy, spearheaded by America’s first President of African descent.

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